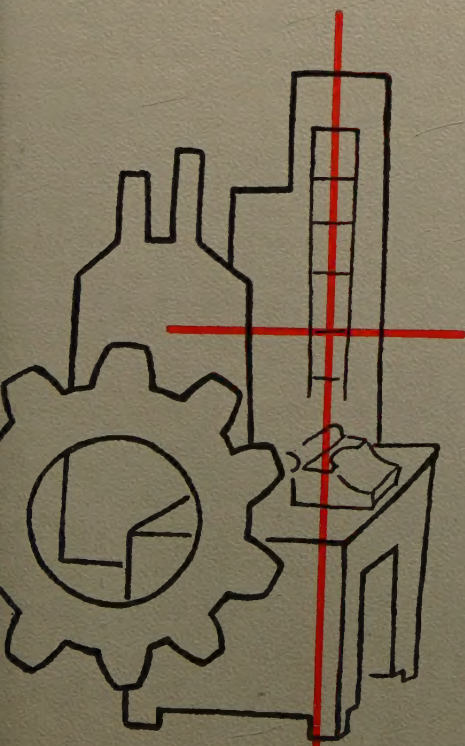


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SOCIAL ACTION

Workingman and
Bureaucrat



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WILLIAM L. MILLER, Editor

GREGOR THOMPSON, Artist

Departmental staff members are: Shirley E. Greene, Agricultural Relations; Francis W. McPeck, Industrial Relations and (Acting) Christian Citizenship; Herman F. Reissig, International Relations; Galen R. Weaver and Jefferson Rogers, Race Relations.

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The views expressed in the magazine do not necessarily represent the official policies of the Council for Social Action. The editor seeks articles from persons of assured competence and presents their views as worthy of thoughtful consideration by our readers.

On Christian Vocation Today

Our doctrine of "vocation" needs constantly to be related to the particular characteristics of work today. Sometimes the discussion of Christian vocation manages to ignore the special nature of work in a huge, industrial, bureaucratic and dynamic society. It may be that the concept of vocation—"calling"—is too much tied to a static, ordered, craft and agrarian society in which an individual's work was a whole in itself. The meaning certainly shifts when the work to which "call" is applied is not that of the self-employed farmer or cobbler but the work of a girl in a forty-girl office or a man on a hundred-man line, which in turn are part of an enterprise of thousands. It shifts, too, when the job goes on no matter who happens to be filling it, and when the whole operation may suddenly be altered or destroyed by a shift in the impersonal working of the market.

The "call" of God to a whole man, in his whole life, still comes to us today, but in relation to the particular situation in which we find ourselves. Leisure has more importance, for there is more of it, and there is a call which concerns our entertainment; politics is now the subject of God's address to us, for political controls are more malleable and important in democratic government; choice of place to work is an important part of our call, for we do not find ourselves in a traditional station, but can to some extent choose for whom and for what we will work; and the collective actions we take through politics and voluntary associations to alter the forms of our society and work-life are a new part of our calling.

God calls us in a real historical situation; our understanding of our own work and our doctrines of vocation, must relate themselves to the particular facts of the time and place in which we are called.

—W. L. M.

Workingman and Bureaucrat

A Christian View of Vocation in Office and Factory

By William May

It has often been said that if you want to get a man to talk, get him to talk about his job. Modern man tends to identify himself with his function in society. He must seek meaning for himself in terms of his place in the work-life of his culture. Perhaps the clearest indication of this fact is the automatic answer we make today when we are asked the question, "Who is he?" More often than not, we answer in terms of a man's function: We say, he is a carpenter; or, he is a trucker; or, he is a manager at Hall's. The significance of this type of answer is clear, especially when we remember that men have not always been accustomed to answering in this way: The ancient Israelite, for example, identified himself with his family. To the question, "Who is he?", more than likely the reply was, he is a son of Benjamin or a son of Judah. This was the most meaningful way in which an Israelite could identify his total life, including his work. Today this answer is heard only faintly in the small town and the country, and perhaps Boston, where the reply is made, "he is one of the Compsons," or "one of the Snopes."

In another culture, however, we know that man may be identified with his personal gifts. School children can tell us, for example, that the Hellenic god was not simply "Mercury" but "wing-footed Mercury." When the question was asked, Who is he, the answer was made in terms of personal talent. He was "that brilliant speaker," "that indifferent pianist," or "that excellent shoemaker." In such a society work was only instrumental to the perfection of self or talent.

In still another age we know that a man might be identified with his property or possessions. In reply to the question, Who is he, the most pertinent answer might be not simply, he is a farmer, but, he has that big farm on the south slope of the town,

or the little grocery behind the bank, or the factory by the river. Again, for such a society, work was relegated to a means. It was a means for the obtainment of basic identity through a property.

Our modern industrial cities, however, have seen most of these forms of identification replaced by identity through job.

Although the family may well be the source of a modern man's private life, his comfort and his pleasure, rarely is it the basis for his public identity and meaning. This fact is obvious each day, as men leave the communities in which their families are known and where much of their family will remain for the large anonymous city and the job with which their lives will be identified.

The talents of a man may find expression in the particular job he fills in factory or office, but even in this situation the talent is measured most fundamentally in terms of the man's function.

Although it was not long ago that most American men identified themselves, at least in their dreams, with a property—with a piece of land, a store on the corner, or a factory they might build and run—it is clear today that most men must identify themselves with a job and not with a property. The farmers have been reduced to a fraction of the nation's population. The corner grocery is being replaced by the super-market. And the family factory has been replaced by the modern corporation, whose ownership is both indirect and impersonal through the instruments of stocks and holding companies, and whose operation is divorced from ownership through the agency of "management" and "labor." Property, like "family" and "talent," may be the source of private enjoyment or pleasure but it does not provide the old access to public identity and meaning.

Modern life then has tended to destroy an abiding relationship to region, talent, property or the "larger" family and driven man to seek his identity in terms of job or function. Therefore it is imperative for the Christian to examine the work-value

involved in our culture, especially the work-values involved in the life of our most prominent figures—the workingman and the bureaucrat. This imperative, moreover, is given added seriousness for the Protestant by the great attention paid during the Reformation itself to the importance of work through the doctrine of vocation or “calling.” Thus, by our contemporary situation and by our historic faith, we are called to an examination of ourselves at work.

The subject of our work-values differs from the kind of social problems with which we are accustomed to dealing. Normally we study social problems for the sake of “social action.” In turn, the very phrase “social action” has led us to those problems for which strategies are possible. With regard to the very character of our work-life, however, it is not so easy to formulate strategies. The usual question, “What are we going to do about it?” is a little less relevant than the question, “How does one understand and behave towards it?” We are still in the process of self-discovery and self-understanding. This is not counsel for the wisdom of inactivity. For the moment, at least, self-understanding may be our most responsible activity.

What is required from the church is a certain responsiveness to the relations men enter into in their dominant roles of workingman and bureaucrat. In the case of the workingman, it appears that this would include interpretation of the following relations: his relation to the tools, to the materials, to the product, to his supervisor, and to his co-workers.



THE WORKINGMAN

Relation to Tools

Man's relationship to tools and machines undergoes radical changes in an industrial society. In a non-industrial era, the tool is either a simple extension of man's power, as a man might use a stone or a plough to turn the earth's surface; or the means by which a man exercises his skills, as a tailor might use a needle. Although the tool makes certain demands upon a man, the predominant experience for the worker is one of control. In an industrial society, however, the worker is often an extension of the power of the tool. For example, two men working in rocky terrain may be aids to a bulldozer, by encircling rocks with a wire line for the bulldozer to pull out. Such men work in an auxiliary relationship to the machine. They are obedient to the requirements of the machine rather than the machine being obedient to the range of their skills. It is men in this auxiliary relationship to the machine, as feeders, operators, attendants, and mechanics or repairmen, who compose the largest numbers of workmen in our industrial force.

a) *The feeders.* Most men and women in factories today work as feeders. Generally they enjoy much less freedom than the free lance worker with the bulldozer, for each man in an ideal assembly line has a specialized form of obedience to the machine. He inserts a valve, assembles two parts, or folds a box for the feeding line.

The important virtues for the feeder are steadiness and speed, attributes which are borrowed from the machine. Concern for these virtues may lead naturally to certain informal prohibitions upon the workers at the point where the worker differs most from the machine, namely in his tendency to talk. Because his virtues are borrowed from the machine, there is always the danger that the feeder may be eliminated by the machine or replaced by another worker like a standardized part. Under these threats the feeder is in special need of the union, not simply for the pursuit of wages but for the protection of his job, and for the establishment of a vocal, or human, community.

Perhaps the peculiar psychological position of the feeder is best revealed by study of the ancient and natural enemy of the assembly line worker, the "speed-up." As is well known, the "speed-up" was, or is, an acceleration of the assembly line itself, which forces a man to work faster. It is different from an ordinary demand for more work by a boss. The speed-up is a direct assault on a man at the point at which he has most compromised himself, namely, in his obedience to the machine. The demand for more work is masqueraded as a requirement of the machine.

But even in less dramatic circumstances than the speed-up it seems that there is a sense of compromise in the relation of the feeder to the machine. It has been shown, for example, that workers' groups will sometimes deliberately limit the volume of their output in a day, even when they are working by piece-rate rather than for an hourly wage. Part of the reason they do this seems to be that it is a social form of protection against a sense of compromise in the job of feeder itself. The worker cannot choose the form but at least he can establish the degree to which he will respond to the machine.

Why does the job of feeder represent something of a compromise in relation to the machine? The answer could lie in the fact that the job counters most of our ideal images of man's relationship to the machine—that of inventor, operator, mechanic, and watcher. A boy traditionally dreams of being an inventor or a train engineer; a man enjoys tinkering with a machine that is broken, or appreciates watching through a knot hole a machine that runs well; but rarely has the feeder of a machine been idealized.

For the most part man cannot depend upon personal strength to establish his superiority over the machine. He must insulate himself from the demands of the machine and his supervisors through the formal power of the union, the internal standards of his own group, and through the personal wisdom that passes in the phrase, "Son, there's no need to kill yourself."

b) *The Operators.* Since the operator is not in the same subservient relation to the machine as the feeder, the question arises whether he may not look on the machine as a satisfying exten-

sion of his own power. The truck driver and the operators of the bulldozer and the factory crane run highly complicated and powerful pieces of machinery which require considerable skill for effective operation. Furthermore, those who serve the industrial system as feeders seem to envy the position of the operator, and with good reason: the operator controls a given organization of power, whereas the feeder is only a unit within a field of power.

Two elements seem to be present in the work satisfactions of the operator: the element of power and the element of skill. Men take satisfaction in a bulldozer that will tear up a lot of ground, a train that will really roll, and a jeep that will respond powerfully to any situation. But men also have to be continually reconvinced that they master this power. Otherwise the machine is not a real expression of their power. Herein lies the critical importance of skill, for it is the basis of any internal relationship between the operator and the machine. A man serves his apprenticeship to a machine and acquires sufficient skill to run it, but also, quite significantly, he may even explore its unrequired potentialities, he may search its limits. As the saying goes, a man will "see what it can do." The whole process is the basis for an internal relation, or a covenant, so to speak, with a machine.

But it is important that we not idealize the situation of the operator, in contrast to that of the feeder; for there is more to be said on the question of skill. It is not possible for a man to develop a skill in regard to a machine unless he can have a multiple rather than a single relationship to its powers. A machine must have a range of potentialities upon which a man may operate with discrimination. But even the bulldozer and the mobile truck are quite limited in their potentialities, to say nothing of the stationary machinery in the factory. Most often in the factory the machine is disposed for the accomplishment of a single task, or at least a very limited set of tasks. Furthermore, the intention of the inventor and management is to simplify the operation of the machine in the course of time, so that it will require even less skill from the operator. Therefore, as a worker controls a tool which is single rather than multiple in

its possibilities, and in so far as this single operation is simplified at its control center, his job satisfaction, as operator, declines and he becomes merely attendant to the machine, with another set of work-values. His operation no longer convinces him that the machine is an extension of his own power, for he neither exercises discrimination on the material upon which he operates nor makes decisions in the direction of the machine. A man can develop a much more varied relationship to a needle in his hand than to a bulldozer.

c) *The attendants or watchers.* In so far as the modern factory is rationalized and perfected, the workingman becomes an attendant rather than a worker. He is a caretaker, or a watcher, rather than an actor. As the factory approaches its ideal limit, the feeder is replaced by the machine itself and the operator is converted into an attendant. The machine process, therefore, attains a kind of immaculate independence—observed, but not immediately controlled. Like some of its products, it is “untouched by human hands.” Dials and knobs are turned; indicators are read and reported. The human relation to the machine is one of watchfulness.

That is probably why Thorstein Veblen compares the modern worker to the shepherd, rather than the farmer, of the two ancient and honorable occupations. The farmer must impress his labor on a resistant material, whereas the shepherd is watchful over something “taking place.” Like the shepherd, the modern attendant and inspector must be watchful of the thousand times when things go well for the one time when they don’t.

But the relation of attendant to the machines is a dignified one. Although the attendant does not have the immediate sense of mastery experienced by the operator, the repairman, and the inventor, at least his job emphasizes a human advantage over the machine, namely, his consciousness over it. But it is precisely at this point that trouble sets in. In so far as the perfection of the factory has taken place, in so far as the laborer is less and less involved in work and becomes supervisor and watcher of the working machine, boredom becomes his great spiritual problem, because boredom is the disease of consciousness or

abstract watchfulness. For the first time the worker faces the vice traditionally reserved for the leisure classes. The man who is working hard, working beyond his physical limits, may be outraged but he is never bored. Resistance from the material against which he works convinces him of his own existence. But the bored worker lives in an unresistant relationship to his machine and its materials. Therefore he will take pains to devise little games or tasks to put himself in a resistant relationship to his job. "Something to pass the time" is the usual way it is expressed.

d) *The mechanics and maintenance men.* The mechanic has the satisfaction of an effective and knowledgeable relationship to the machine. But less and less of the total population shares in the generalized skill of the mechanic. The effect of this is not so important in the factory itself where adjustment is made through the institution of the expert. It is more important in the relation of the mechanic to the private owners of machines. The private owner in the past twenty years has been removed from an amateur's relation to his machine, because of its increased complexity and efficiency. The machine is taken for granted if not abused. Therefore, when it breaks down, the

BOOKS ON THE WORKINGMAN

The Viking Portable Veblen is a good selection of the provocative writings of Thorstein Veblen, many of which bear on the problems discussed in this essay. See especially his *Instinct of Workmanship*. Veblen's psychology of "instincts" may be outmoded, but he is still more suggestive about modern industrial values than many who use the latest language.

Elton Mayo's *The Human Problems of an Industrial Civilization* is the best book by the man whose teaching at Harvard Business School led to a new approach to the problems of the worker.

The author recommends these books to the general reader. He acknowledges his indebtedness to them and to the books of the Hawthorne Study, especially Roethlisberger and Dickson, *Management and the Worker*, and Roethlisberger, *Management and Morale*.

owner has automatic recourse to the mechanic, who is often caught between a machine he can respect and an ownership he cannot respect.

Relation to Materials

In the age of craftsmanship a man worked with his own relatively small kit of tools to give him access to the raw materials upon which he worked, leather, iron, gold, stones, wood, and to shape this raw material to a product appropriate to its nature. Since the craftsman worked directly on his material, he had to be sensitive to the varying values in the material itself.

The majority of jobs in the industrial era have removed men from direct contact with the raw materials of their work. As each job in the factory is specialized, the worker has contact only with material in the process of production. He deals with the materials which have been sorted, processed, and standardized. His own workmanship depends upon performing his single task in relation to materials to bring them to a new state of consistency, one step advanced, for the next man or machine.

To recognize the importance of this change we must realize that a skill is not simply dexterity in the use of tools, but responsiveness to the varying qualities—the strength and the weaknesses—of the materials upon which tools operate. Therefore, no matter how much skill may go into the mastery of a particular machine, into the control of its power, if its power is directed toward the accomplishment of its purposes upon unvarying materials, then this skill in its turn becomes a matter of routine in relation to an undifferentiated daily volume. Certainly one of the factors that prevents truck-driving from being a matter of routine is that the driver must respond to a variety of conditions, or materials, for the operation of his machine—the size of his load, weather, traffic conditions, the road, and the handling of a hill. In the ordinary factory job, however, man cannot use his powers of discrimination in distinguishing the values of the standardized materials upon which he works. At best the worker can only distinguish between the thousands of articles in his province that live up to unvarying specification and those few

which don't. Therefore, the worker is uninstructed by his material. He doesn't learn by its merit because this merit is unvarying. He doesn't learn by its defects, because he doesn't have to live with or make something of its defects. (This is summed up in the industrial phrase "reject.") The worker may respond only to a volume of material with a volume of work. The fundamental measurement is quantitative. The worker has no meaningful access to a variety of qualities. And when man loses his access to qualities in his work, he loses his "curiosity," which Thorstein Veblen has shrewdly called the material prerequisite to workmanship and creativity.

The situation we have been describing has been brought about by the Industrial Revolution, but it will be completed in the Chemical Revolution. The Chemical Revolution will affect *directly* the materials themselves. Materials will not even enter the factory in their natural state. They will be brought to a state of planned homogeneity by remote formulae.

The effects of the Industrial and Chemical Revolutions reach beyond the question of the skills of the factory worker; they pose problems for man's appreciation of the products of the industrial machine; they pose the problem of taste.

Herbert Read, the eminent English art critic, points out in the "Grass Roots of Modern Art" that one of the reasons for the enormously bad taste of a competitive industrial society, in its selection and use of goods, is the fact that the great body of workers do not live in an evaluative relation to materials in their work-life. If a man is not called upon daily to exercise his powers of discrimination upon the materials with which he works, how can he be expected to exercise such discrimination in his consumption of goods?

Relation to Product

Almost as if to compensate for the fact that the worker is removed from materials in the course of the production of goods, we attempt to re-invest these materials as finished products with quasi-spiritual powers. We advertise wonder drugs and plastics, and cigarettes that will relax the worker, exude romance for

the young girl, and dramatize a conference for the young executive. Meanwhile there is a curious instability in our regard for these marvels. The wonder car of 1952 will be replaced by a more wonderful car in 1953. Nor does its salesman feel any bond of loyalty to his product should a rival firm offer a more attractive job for the following year. We are in the curious position of creating goods, in which we enjoin all men to participate, and then annihilating or abandoning them the following year.

Relation to the Supervisor

The relationship of the worker to his superior has changed in the shift from a craft to an industrial society. Formerly the worker as an apprentice learned the skills of his master. Both were workmen with tools and materials who were distinguished from each other in degree of skill and experience. But in the modern factory the duty of the good supervisor is not to work directly on the machine himself, but to "see that the work gets done." Literally he supervises, or "looks over," his workers and machines.

The fact that there is such a thing as a supervisor in the modern factory says two important things about work. First, it presumes that men have little stake in their jobs and that management is in need of a special class of men who will see that the work is done. The need for supervision intimates that man is alienated from his work. Second, it presumes that it is better for a man to command or observe than to "work" at all. The dignity of the master craftsman rested in the fact that he was more skilled than the apprentice. The dignity of the supervisor rests in the fact that he doesn't have to work at all. (Both of these facts, of course, contribute to the extraordinary evaluation of leisure time in our culture.)

But the prestige of the supervisor has weakened in recent times. In those companies today in which labor unions are strong, the powers of the supervisor and foreman have been strictly curtailed. The supervisor neither represents the authority of the company, nor the requests of the worker upon the company. These problems of power representation are carried on, not

between the supervisor and the individual worker, but between the union leadership and the higher levels of management. The supervisor becomes just a kind of attendant and traffic manager to the activities within his department.

The supervisor is in a rather thankless position. He doesn't participate in the decisions of management and he can't identify himself with the worker. He is neither fish nor fowl. And the fact that his job is primarily that of overseeing can cause him to antagonize the worker because work requires a certain amount of privacy. The man who resents the constant surveillance of the supervisor at his shoulder is making an understandable request for such privacy. In the old-time relationship of the master of a craft to his apprentice the master was as much observed as he was observer. But the supervisor is observer alone.

As a result of this tension the supervisor must develop a tactful ability to see—a watchfulness that doesn't appear to be watching. Sooner or later from the side of the worker certain discreet accommodations for privacy will be developed. The locker room, the washroom, and piled lumber behind the warehouse are favorite escapes from surveillance.

On the job the worker may insulate himself from the presence of the supervisor by creating for himself a kind of "sphere of attention," something like the sphere of attention which the cosmetics demonstrator creates for herself under different circumstances.

The hostilities of the worker are often directed toward the supervisor rather than the company. The company is something abstract, impersonal, and hard to get at, but the supervisor is immediate and at hand. Innumerable cases of what Elton Mayo and Roethlisberger have called "morbid preoccupation" and "obsessive thinking" in monotonous jobs have been thoughts harbored against the supervisor. Even problems which have their origins in the home-life of the worker (but which are externalized in the factory situation because of the undiverting monotony of the jobs) may erupt in the feeling that the supervisor "has it in for me."

Relation of Workers to Each Other

Group Identity

Workers are traditionally and correctly represented as having a strong sense of group identity. Otherwise the worker would not have the ability to organize as an economic and political power in the union. This sense of identity expresses itself in many informal ways: in the strong feeling of comradeship in any workers' dining hall, in the openness of conversation and the fraternal joke, and in the willingness to trade off and cover up for each other in their jobs when they wouldn't consider for a moment lifting a finger for a foreman other than their own. In fact, the very process by which the factory has been systematized has contributed to a score of common experiences for the worker: the weekly pay-check, the uniform hours for starting and quitting, the locker rooms, the washrooms, and the common machines, materials and shelter for work.

The power of this group-identity is evident in a worker's reluctance to turn in a suggestion to management for a "suggestion box" award, because his plan might throw a number of men out of work. Another illustration is the fact that an informal workers' group can set its own standards of production, despite the attempt of management to individualize incentive through piece-rate schemes. The power is also shown in the unions themselves which have survived their own transition from intimate institutions into national, impersonal bureaucracies. These things could not happen except that much of the substance of the worker's life is identified not with his tools, his skills, or his materials, but simply in his function and life as a worker among workers.

Group Distinctions

Once having said this, it must be noted that this sense of group-identity is not such that distinctions are washed away. Just as the crafts and the trades have their peculiar sense of identity and prestige, workers in a given industry organize themselves in an elaborate hierarchy. Part of this is the result of the formal

decisions of union and management. Wages, skills and seniority become obvious marks of distinction. But part of this is the informal structure developed by the workers themselves. Jobs which cannot be distinguished on the basis of pay, skill, or amount of labor required will be distinguished on seemingly trivial variations in machines or materials. Or even the question of location may become terribly important—control of a window, access to the washroom, the dining hall or the exit.

These distinctions may be a quest for meaning and status more immediate than membership in a vast undifferentiated group. Partly they may be an informal way of participating in the hierarchical character of the corporation itself at levels at which the hierarchy has exhausted itself. Sometimes they may be the result of a need to be placed in a resistant and claimant relation to a group when one is in an unresistant and undemanding relation to a job. (Undoubtedly many a contest over status has been started in order to break up the sheer monotony of the day's work on the machine.) And sometimes the host of distinctions may be a way of establishing an equitable and just relation among men who live in an inequitable relation to a very demanding machine.

At any rate, it is inevitable that a society in which men find their basic identity through function, rather than through property, talent or family, should hedge and secure these functions with proper claims for status. If a man must seek his personal identity through his function, then his function must be accredited.



THE BUREAUCRAT

Between 10:30 a.m. and 12 noon in a Cleveland heater factory battalions of girls working on assembly lines leave at 10-minute intervals for the company dining hall. They pass through a cafeteria line thoughtfully supplied even with the foods of the national origins of the workers. At 12 noon battalions of office girls file into the same cafeteria through another door from an adjoining building. They pass through the same line and eat the same food, an hour later.

If an observer were to walk from the factory building, with its assembly lines, into the large office, with its battery of typewriters and desks, he might conclude that the girl in the office has taken up much of the same kind of work-life as the girl in the factory.

The girl in the office of the heater company is a member of a bureaucracy. She could just as easily work for the federal government in Washington, the Ford Motor Company, the Army, the C.I.O., the Sun Oil Company, or any one of the thousands of large bureaucratic organizations in the country. Chief among these bureaucracies are the corporations.

Whether a person working for a company is Vice-President in charge of manufacturing, a sales representative in Canton, Ohio, or a typist in the home office, he fulfills a definite function, a prescribed and specialized area of activity, which will survive the death, departure, or promotion of the man or woman who happens to be filling it. These functions are arranged in a hierarchy. The diagram of the office is the pyramid. Typists and file clerks, supervisors, division heads, departmental chiefs, Vice Presidents, and President are related to each other in an ordered sequence to the top. The bureaucracy is not intended to be a democracy. Authority comes from above, rather than below, and extends downward to the very procedure for filing a given receipt.

In the operation of the corporation there is a great dividing line in the hierarchy. This line does not separate those who have authority from those who don't, rather it distinguishes between

those who participate in the decisions of the company and those who don't. For example, the office supervisor exercises authority, but his authority is routine and prescribed. He is not a part of "management." Being a member of management distinguishes the upper from the lower half of the workers in a business office.

The Lower Case

The pattern of the office is well-nigh universal:

A long counter or a receptionist at a desk cuts off the public from the work-life of the office in a more discreet way than the guard at the factory gate. On the other side of the counter the authority of the company operates. The visitor presents his problem or request in terms of this authority. His problem is handled by procedure.

Desks are spaced an equal distance from each other. The front row is occupied by typists and file clerks, the back row at the windows by the salesmen for the department. To the left are the offices of the assistant sales manager and the manager. These offices are walled off from the floor and from each other by glass partitions. The manager's office is to the rear. From his office, somewhat deep in the authority of the company, he has a commanding view of the typists, the desks of the salesmen and the assistant sales manager.

The gradation of jobs within the office is unmistakable: The typists are most exposed by location to the public. Furthermore, they use 40-inch desks. The salesmen enjoy whatever advantages accrue to them from location near windows and from the finality of the back wall against which they are placed. They use company Chevrolets for their trips, and in the office they have 48-inch desks with a wooden chair to the side. The assistant manager has an office to himself with floor tiling and with a supply of upholstered chairs for his guests. The top manager has a personal secretary whose desk is detached from the regularity of the front row and located just outside his office. Those who gain entrance to the office are in the presence of floor carpeting, drapes, a small conference table, water carafe and glasses, leather chairs, and a manager who uses a 60-inch desk.

All these marks of prestige are quite orderly and acceptable. They are ways of publicizing authority. They are not intended simply to cater to the ego of the worker, certainly not the individual worker, but to make legitimate the commands and decisions of the company. They are quickly assimilated by the promoted man as accepted signs of his function.

The 40-Inch and the 48-Inch Desks or The Front Row

Work for those at the lowest levels of the organization is routine in character. The modern corporation, like the modern machine, is built to handle volume. When we say that a business is systematized we mean that the individual case, the individual receipt, or the complaint, is reduced to its class (it is important that the office worker not make up rules in dealing with a given case) and then someone is put in charge of the class. If it is possible to enlarge the capacities of the individual dealing with a class, through an electric typewriter, or to replace him altogether with an IBM machine, this is done.

A job that is defined by volume is vulnerable to replacement by the machine whether in the office or in the factory. The increase in the use of machinery in the office has been vast since the end of World War II. According to C. Wright Mills, the industrial revolution is taking place more swiftly in the office than it did in the factory.

Meanwhile, as long as the machine is not sovereign in the office as it is in the factory, there is a major difference in the routine character of the work for each group. The factory worker, we noted, was primarily a feeder of the machine. The office worker is a digester. The function is symbolized by the "In" and "Out" baskets.

The major experience of workers in the factory is that of serving machines; in the office it is processing or handling materials. The modern stenographer has ear phones clamped to her head to receive dictation which she transmits to paper. In order to be sure that she will have a steady supply of materials to process, she no longer works as a private secretary to a junior

executive. She works in a typing group, receiving a steady flow of work from a score of men.

The sales accounting department is organized to handle hundreds of thousands of receipts, as are the staffs for manufacturing and transportation. In all these departments at their lower levels a vast volume of material is handled without recourse to the voluntary levels of corporation life. Eventually these records repose in the great files of the company, where they remain passive to the day that a report to the directors, the government, or a customer must be substantiated.

The routine character of the work is the important point. As a result, the sharp break between work and "free time" develops in the office as it does in the factory. Alienation from work is presumed in the office as in the factory. Workers are not expected to be talking about company problems on their way to the coffee shop, so the coffee hour is controlled and regularized. Only management is permitted general freedom from the desk,

BOOKS ON BUREAUCRACY

C. Wright Mills' *White Collar* is a systematic and thorough study of work and life in the modern corporation, especially good in its treatment of the lower and middle levels of office employment.

William H. Whyte's *Is Anybody Listening?* is a sprightly series of essays on the problems of communication, authority, democracy and social conformity in the modern corporation. (First published in *Fortune*.)

Max Weber wrote a concise and brilliant account of the characteristics of the bureaucracy, which is now available in English in the volume, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, translated by Gerber and Mills.

Chester I. Barnard's two books, *The Function of the Executive* and *Organization and Management*, are careful studies of the problems of executive management by a person of great practical experience.

The author acknowledges his indebtedness to all these books in his study of the bureaucrat, and recommends them, especially the first two, to the general reader.

because only at the upper levels can it be presumed that there will be attention to work under any circumstances.

The nine-to-five day becomes as fixed a schedule for the office worker as seven to three for the laboring man. For both alike quitting time is the boundary between two different realms of experience. There is none of that surplus of curiosity towards the job that marks the skilled craftsman, the artist, or the business executive.

Meanwhile the glass windows that expose the battery of desks to the glance of the manager reestablish the class of men required in alienated work—the supervisors. Companies make use of the title, “work-supervisor.” And the outstanding change in office planning in the last twenty years has been the destruction of the small office. Now the immediate boss is either present on the floor or available through the glass. One executive observed that the creation of the common office was by no means for democratizing the office. Aside from encouraging an efficient flow of work, it mainly provided for economical supervision. At a single glance a supervisor could command an acre of desks. The large office is instituted for the sake of supervision because it is assumed that the work itself lacks the power to intrigue the attention of the worker.

The spoken word occupies far more important a place in the work-life of the office than the factory. Conversation in the factory is immediately suspect, because it belongs more to the personal than to the functional life of the worker. But in the office, information must be obtained, records talked over, and people seen. In fact, the entire activity of the company is dependent upon the flow of communication: Directives, conferences, procedures and orders.

The large office and its pooling of services—typing, stenography, etc.—has resulted in a functional approach to work and has reduced the importance of personal loyalty. The girl who works in a pool of typists performs an impersonal function. She is only accidentally related to the executives whose work she handles in a day.

Today a special industrial relations department can take over

the tasks of hiring employees for the corporation. Functions are being filled. It is not necessary for a boss to participate in the act of hiring the girl, because he needn't be involved in a personal relationship to his help. Nor does the girl "owe" her job to the boss for whom she comes to work. She has an accredited function in the company.

The setting up of a job-evaluation program in a company is a direct admission that work-relations can be analyzed in terms of public function. It is an attempt to interpret the job in terms of its class rather than to trust to the inequalities involved in personal response from case to case. It is a recognition that personal identity is now sought through function and that therefore the function must be equalized and accredited.

The Upper Case

The man in the inner office has privacy. He has decisions to make that cannot be measured simply in terms of volume of work or sales. He is the first level in the corporation in which the need for privacy on the job is acknowledged. Not only does he have his personal privacy, but accommodations are made in his office for conferences with executives and the meeting with a big customer. He participates in a life in which deals are closed and plans are formulated. Those in the outer office see only the outward signs of these events in the making, the fact that the conference was held or the customer was there, until management decides to communicate its plans.

The man in the inner office is not bound to his desk. He has risen above the level of routine. In fact, books have warned the executive that he should avoid "desk-bound thinking." Going out to lunch may be the occasion for business, playing golf with a customer may wind up a sale; whereas the ordinary worker accepts his noon-hour lunch with relief from the job and hurries around the golf course before dark to play a full card.

Imagination, decision-making power, drive, and creative energy are the commended marks of the top-notch executive. But the trait that primarily sets him off from all those below him in the hierarchy is the fact that he identifies the major substance

of his life with the life of the corporation. Contrast him with the workingman or the average worker.

Industrial psychologists have noted that the workingman may often externalize his home worries into the factory. William H. Whyte, in contrast, has reported from management psychologists that "the average executive shows a remarkable ability to repress his home worries while on the job."^{*}

For those on the 8-hour shift the working day closes when the factory whistle blows or the typewriter is covered. Rarely, however, does the executive shut out his office worries from his home.

These are the sure signs of the dividing line in the corporation. The executive draws his life from the life of the corporation, perhaps taking this real life even into his home and leisure; the worker's real life in home and leisure may intrude into his work.

Promotion

How does the executive get where he is? Writers usually remark that in the promotion of the executive the "ability to get along," the quality of "fitting in," the capacity for social skills have figured strongly, rather than a technical skill. The latter is already abundant, where needed, in the research assistant, the lawyer, the accountant, the laboratory technician, and the varieties of expert.

Most writers have emphasized the capacity to adapt and adjust, because they have noted the highly social character of the modern corporation. Success in an earlier business community depended upon a boldness, an aggressiveness, and a capacity for decision which built a business from its small beginnings to a sizable empire. But success for the young man today depends more upon agile movement within a pre-arranged hierarchy. The young business man, and even his wife, more often are adapting to a form, rather than creating a new form.

This "ability to get along" may not be just a generalized popularity. Executives, who remember their origins, often remark that it was a certain man who helped them along the way or who

^{*} *Is Anybody Listening?* William H. Whyte, p. 166.

recognized their abilities. As in city machine politics, promotion in the corporation depends upon an informal system of sponsorship. It is only natural in a structure whose authority comes from above.

When men in an earlier business society wished to disparage the achievement of a business man, they chalked up his success to "luck." It wasn't really his ability that made the business what it was, it was the break in the market, the price of materials, or the lucky sale. Therefore, we are accustomed to say that a man built a "fortune," a peculiarly ambivalent word.

But today when men would disparage the achievement of a business man, they don't describe it quite as much in terms of "luck" as in terms of "pull" or "contacts." The earlier period presupposed man as pitted against impersonal, fateful circumstances, which might or might not favor his purposes. The later period presupposes man as an operator in a field of persons.

In his rise to the top a man has to be oriented towards the man above him. He exercises a decision-making power, but his decisions must be calculated in terms of the boss.

When an executive, who has been reared in the corporation, finally rises to the top, he occupies for the first time not an intermediate but an ultimate seat of authority. He is faced with the full burden of freedom which hasn't been his privilege along the line in the hierarchy. In no wise has he experienced the freedom of the empire-builders who were ultimate centers of authority from the first days in their gas-lit stores to their last. The executive today makes decisions along the line but he doesn't have final authority until he reaches the top.

Therefore, it is not surprising to see modern executives partially discharge the enormous burden of their freedom in a complex society by reliance on the outside expert and the inside advisor. Business school professors are called in as consultants on economics and industrial relations. Outside law firms exercise enormous influence in the operation of the company and supply it with top officials. (Reliance on the outside expert has the

special advantage that it doesn't require dependence upon those who are the subjects of one's decisions.) But the modern executive may also relay his authority back down the line by working with committees, conferences, or advisors.

At this point we touch upon the dominant spiritual problem facing the bureaucracy today—the fact that it is an authoritarian structure in a democratic society. We have already seen how this worked itself out at the supervisory level. The responsibility of the supervisor is to “get the job done.” He never speaks for the employee to the company. As a result the voice of the company, as William Whyte has pointed out, is always heard downward through the company. The voice of the lower levels rarely reaches toward the top, except as the voice of the union.

The very spirit involved in the command to “get the job done” will force the supervisors to doctor up the information which they return to the top. This is one reason perhaps for the development by management of agents other than line authority for the receiving of information. The counselor, the industrial relations section and the outside efficiency expert are agents through which management accumulates information when it has disqualified its line staff as a genuine source.

As management senses that the lower reaches of the company or the outside world are critical or indifferent to its policies, it speaks through the public relations pamphlet in its downward reach. Normally, however, it speaks through notice, command, or directive, when it would speak with authority, or through rumor when events are in the making.

In the course of time the authority of management has been modified by the awareness that the material it is attempting to control is human. But the insuperable barrier to democracy is that management can never yield any control to the claimants to whom it listens. These claims merely add complexity to the material that executives manipulate. Certainly this is not the result of any sinister characteristic of the managers. The problem of communicating the power of decision to others is difficult. Chester I. Barnard points out the difficulty facing the cor-

poration that would inject the "democracy" of the committee into its operation. The sheer time-lag involved in decision by committee usually leads a boss to make his own pressing decisions first and to propose long-range artificial problems for the committee to handle. The committee is removed from genuine problems, or it becomes an interesting object of manipulation for the pressed executive.

The external character of the committee administration in one corporation was illustrated by the prompt collapse of an elaborate committee structure, as soon as the executive in charge moved to another job. No enduring structures of participation are present as long as they thrive on the largesse or needs of one man. That we would automatically expect them to collapse in his absence merely confirms the fact that they are not inherently a center of power in the corporation.

Another method of spreading authority is to increase the number of executives with bona fide departments who report to one man and, if possible, repeat this process down the line. This method is admitted by its backers to counter the canons of efficiency, but it is felt that the corporation may have to decide whether it is willing to make sacrifices to overcome its own spiritual deficiencies, whether it will develop an open structure, responsive to its own inadequacies. A corporation will always be more willing to experiment in these directions in the midst of a relatively stable economy, when it is not living too near the margin of survival.

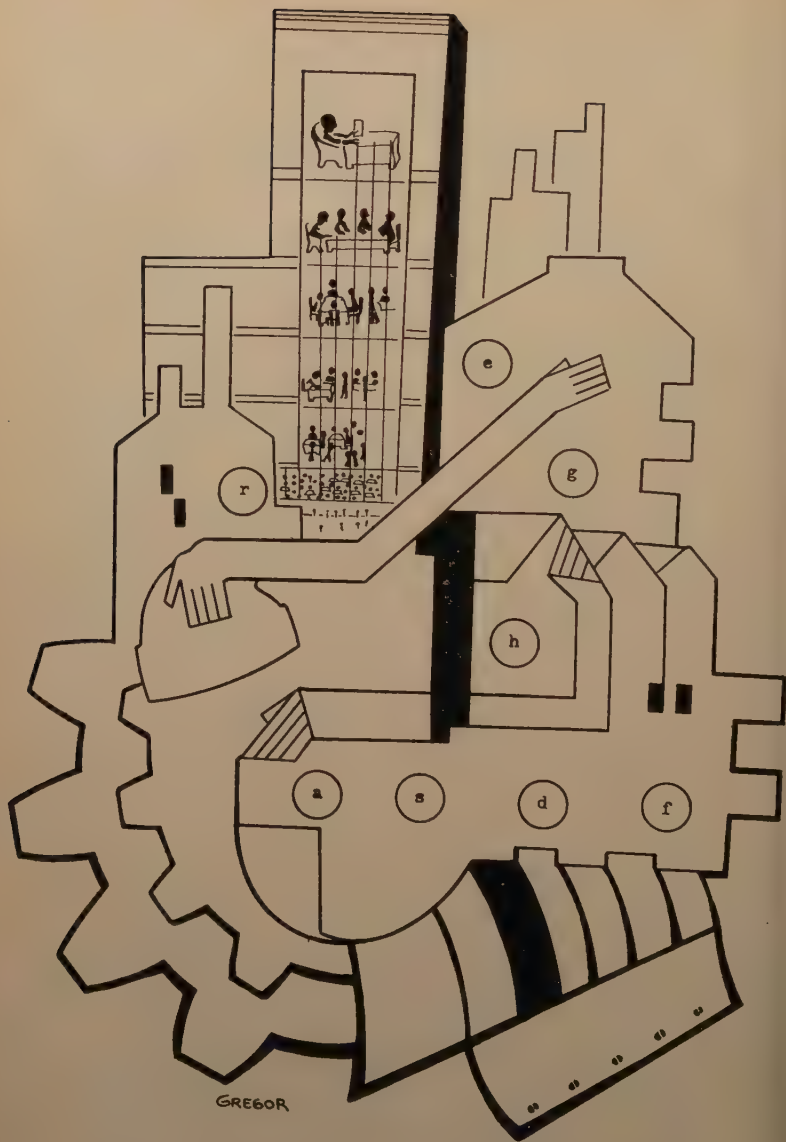
But advisory staff councils, committee meetings, and decentralization of authority are not the only means by which a corporation would seek to reinject a sense of belonging into a structure which admits decision-making power only to the few.

The monthly magazine is dedicated to the proposition that employees are members of the same family. It will convey the inevitable picture of the gasoline attendant, his wife, and children in Joplin, Missouri. It will faithfully record the births, extra-curricular triumphs, marriages, and retirements of the 10,000 workers of a company.

Also the speeches of executives are filled with phrases that would urge upon listeners the values of belonging—"team spirit," "harmony," and "cooperation" are automatic high points in a conference evening.

But it is an inescapable fact that these latter strategies, connected with the morale of a corporation, are not intended to extend downward the sphere of decision; they are designed to instill a greater enthusiasm for the decisions that have already been made. But whether they be genuine attempts at restructuring the corporation itself or attempts to spiritualize its present structure, the motivation for enlarging the sense of participation in the life of the corporation is powerful.

It is always a temptation to exaggerate the authoritarian character of the bureaucracy in the free society. Actually our institutions have remained fairly open. It is the very grave duty of the executive to encourage and preserve openness. This does not necessarily mean adopting some of the mannerisms of democracy, the committee meeting, or the family approach. But it does require moral restraint on the part of the man in the inner office, if he is not to take too seriously his inner sanctum, that he listen attentively to the voices outside.



CONCLUSION

Now and then the phrase, "the alienated worker," has appeared in our remarks: Workers in the factory and the office do not work with their own land or property, like the farmer and the small business man. They don't work with their own tools like the artist and the craftsman. Usually they do not have to employ the full range of their talents, as they might in a less specialized age. And finally they don't have the satisfaction of directly serving the user of their products or the beneficiaries of their work, like the most humble domestic servant, the lamp-lighter and the tailor, in a more personalized era. Man is removed or alienated from property, talent and the neighbor he serves.

In each case, though, we are measuring modern life against a value from the past. We are taking note of the values that have been torn up, rather than the values that we may now be creating. Pride in the achievements of a bureaucratic society must be tempered by awareness of those work-values we have destroyed.

But more important than praise or condemnation is the recognition on the part of the church that the language for its doctrine of vocation has not been spoken in the language of the present age. The Lutheran and Calvinist doctrines of the callings presumed that men were personally addressed by God in their work. But this claim for the service of persons has to take some kind of root in the person. In a society of property it takes root in the concept of stewardship. In a society of the entrepreneurial talent, it takes root in the virtues of industry and integrity and in the dynamics of destiny. In a society based on family it takes root in tradition. Today, in a time when men are removed from property, talent, and family, it is a question as to how this claim will take its root.

Despite everything that has been said about alienation, the claim of calling may reach a man partly through his function, through his routine job. The routine job is not automatically a source of alienation. There is a difference between a sense of identity through talent and a sense of identity through function.

Our society has even hedged and protected and accredited its functions against sheer talent, through its principle of seniority. The corporation and the union could not do this if men did not already identify themselves in some degree with function. Therefore, the language of the Church may be directed *in part* to a man's function, his routine work in a line or a hierarchy.

But what language may the church use? It cannot impart personal meaning into a job from a stockpile of leftover sentiments. It cannot simply draw pictures for the cost accountant or the repairman of a Municipal Light and Power Company, showing them how their jobs contribute to the lighting of an entire city, just as the lamplighter once took care of a neighborhood (less efficiently) in a bygone era. Very few people can, or will, seek meaning in this generalized way even at the managerial levels. The fact that the corporations are beginning to speak of the social significance of their various jobs indicates more that the Horatio Alger myth is dead than that the new myth taps live feelings and claims in the worker. Not that the generalized good is unimportant; the church has its message to preach in this respect, but few men in factories or offices find their identities through the significances of the end product of the business. The church must also be aware of the concrete character of the job which the worker fulfills, aware not simply of the generalized service the whole structure performs, but also of the particular part which the worker must play. It would be ironical for a doctrine of calling which presumes personal address, not to address men where in reality they are.

Once having admitted some relevance of "calling" to the worker's function, I would make the flat assertion that the concept of calling must also be enlarged *beyond* the range of job or function.

It must be remembered that the doctrine of the callings emerged in an age when there was need to extend the religious significance of life *beyond* the special borders of the monastery and the cathedral. Since the life of most men and women at that time could largely be defined in terms of their work-life, whether they were shoemakers or housewives, serving customers or chil-

dren, it is natural that the doctrine of vocation or calling should exclusively refer to "career." Life and work-life were somewhat equivalent.

The traditional craft or entrepreneurial career could support this evaluation, as long as most jobs could genuinely claim the energies and talents of people, and as long as one's efforts might have immediate relevance in service of neighbor. But if our own analysis is correct, the modern bureaucratic and factory structures, except at the upper levels, have denied most men (or freed most men from) this total absorption with career. The life of a man can not be equated with the prescribed sphere of activity that he maintains for the corporation.

It would be an unfortunate limitation in our understanding of calling, which was originally intended to give religious significance to the life of the ordinary man, and an unfortunate trivialization of all actions other than those prescribed by the manuals of the corporation, if the modern meaning of vocation were to be reduced to one's function.

In the opinion of the author the meaning of calling must be enlarged to include, for example, two other kinds of claims:

a) The claim of power structures other than the bureaucratic structure for which one works.

It is fairly apparent that by its very nature the modern bureaucratic structure, even when least authoritarian, must deny most men participation in the final goals of its activity.* Men do not participate in the events that control their destiny and define their service within the structures of work in industrial society.

There are ways, however, in which the worker who has lost his voice may participate in decisions, which as an individual performing a function he could not possibly make. The labor union for the worker and political parties for every man are just two ways in which men have access to the power of decision.

In a sense these structures of power are a genuine part of the work-life of a man. They help control the fruits of his work and

* For a good opinion to the contrary read *Organization and Management* by Chester I. Barnard.

they affect the decisions of the organization for which he works, as he would never affect them in a seven-to-three day. This is not meant to give sanctity to particular organizations, such as the union or the political party, any more than it sanctifies functions to say they draw their significance from a sense of calling. But it must be recognized that these power units control destiny, a destiny in which the worker is just as deeply involved as was the free-lance lawyer with his career in the pioneer community.

One difficulty is that we treat politics as if it were beyond the sphere of "personal life." We vaguely feel that it belongs to our surplus, public, and leisure activities. More and more of the decisions concerning our work-life, however, occur beyond the borders of the work-day. We are personally addressed outside the job by those other structures of power in which we participate. The wisdom of these decisions influences the destiny of the bureaucratic structure itself.

b) The claim involved in our voluntary associations:

A mass society throws people together in such a way that informal, voluntary communities develop in the midst of our functional life. Sometimes these associations last no more than a moment's length between a clerk and a customer with a problem or between the permanent worker and the man who works for a day. Sometimes they may lead to more abiding "voluntary" communities, those of the community theatre, the neighborhood civic league, the informal workers' groups in the factory. All these voluntary communities involve claims which constitute part of one's calling.

Perhaps a society that distinguishes most vividly between the involuntary and the voluntary will afford us with a final example. The army is a social structure which is most strictly bureaucratized. The private in the army least participates in a decision-making power. He fulfills simply a function under the full weight of command. He is at the disposal of his superiors for the purposes of state. At the same time he fulfills his public duty, the soldier is also involved in private voluntary associations. They compose the well-known "buddy" system in the army—friend-

ships of great comfort and security that can lapse when each man goes his own way.

It would be unfortunate and false either to ignore or to confine the language of the church to the public claim. These voluntary associations make equally vivid claims on the total life of the individual. They make a claim as strong as that ignored by the priest and the Levite on the road to Jericho. In fact, many of our claims will do just that—pull us slightly off the road of the functions we fill—the scribe, the lawyer, the inspector, the teacher, the feeder of the machine.

We cannot avoid the claims made upon us. As in the time of Luther, the sense of calling refers, not to just the life of the few or to a single part of their lives, but to the life of the many in every aspect of their existence.

For Further Reading*

BOOKS

Calhoun, Robert L. *God and the Common Life*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935.

Comprehensive, scholarly, and penetrating. Worth the careful reading it requires.

— *God and the Day's Work*. New York: Association Press, 1943.

Miller, Alexander. *Christian Faith and My Job*. New York: Association Press. 1946. A. Haddam House Book.

These two volumes are brief, readable, informative, and stimulating treatments of vocation and work from the Christian perspective; one is by an American, the other by a British, author.

* Taken from "Religion in the Day's Work," a handbook prepared by the Department of the Church and Economic Life (297 Fourth Avenue, New York 10, 20¢ a copy), using methods and materials from the 1952 Buffalo Conference on the Christian and His Daily Work.

Nall, T. Otto, and Bert H. Davis. *Young Christians at Work*. New York: Association Press, 1951.

Oldham, J. H. *Work in Modern Society*. New York: Morehouse-Gorham Co., 1950, for the Study Department of the World Council of Churches.

Written as part of the World Council of Churches' current emphasis on the Christian meaning of work.

Tawney, R. H. *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*. New York: New American Library. Originally Holland Memorial Lectures 1922, reprinted 1947.

Still a readable and classic account of the role of Protestantism in economic and industrial life since the Reformation.

MATERIALS AVAILABLE FROM THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

These may all be ordered from the Department of the Church and Economic Life, 297 Fourth Avenue, New York 10, N.Y.

The Christian at His Daily Work, by Cameron P. Hall. 35¢

Prepared as background material for the North American Lay Conference on the Christian and His Daily Work and its follow-up in the churches.

Report of the North American Lay Conference on The Christian and His Daily Work. 35¢

Buffalo Conference message and occupational group reports.

On-the-Job Dilemmas of Christian Laymen. 30¢

Addresses of church leaders, lay and clergy, at the North American Lay Conference on the Christian and His Daily Work.

The Christian and His Occupation, by J. H. Oldham. 10¢

Excerpts from preparatory paper of the Amsterdam Assembly.

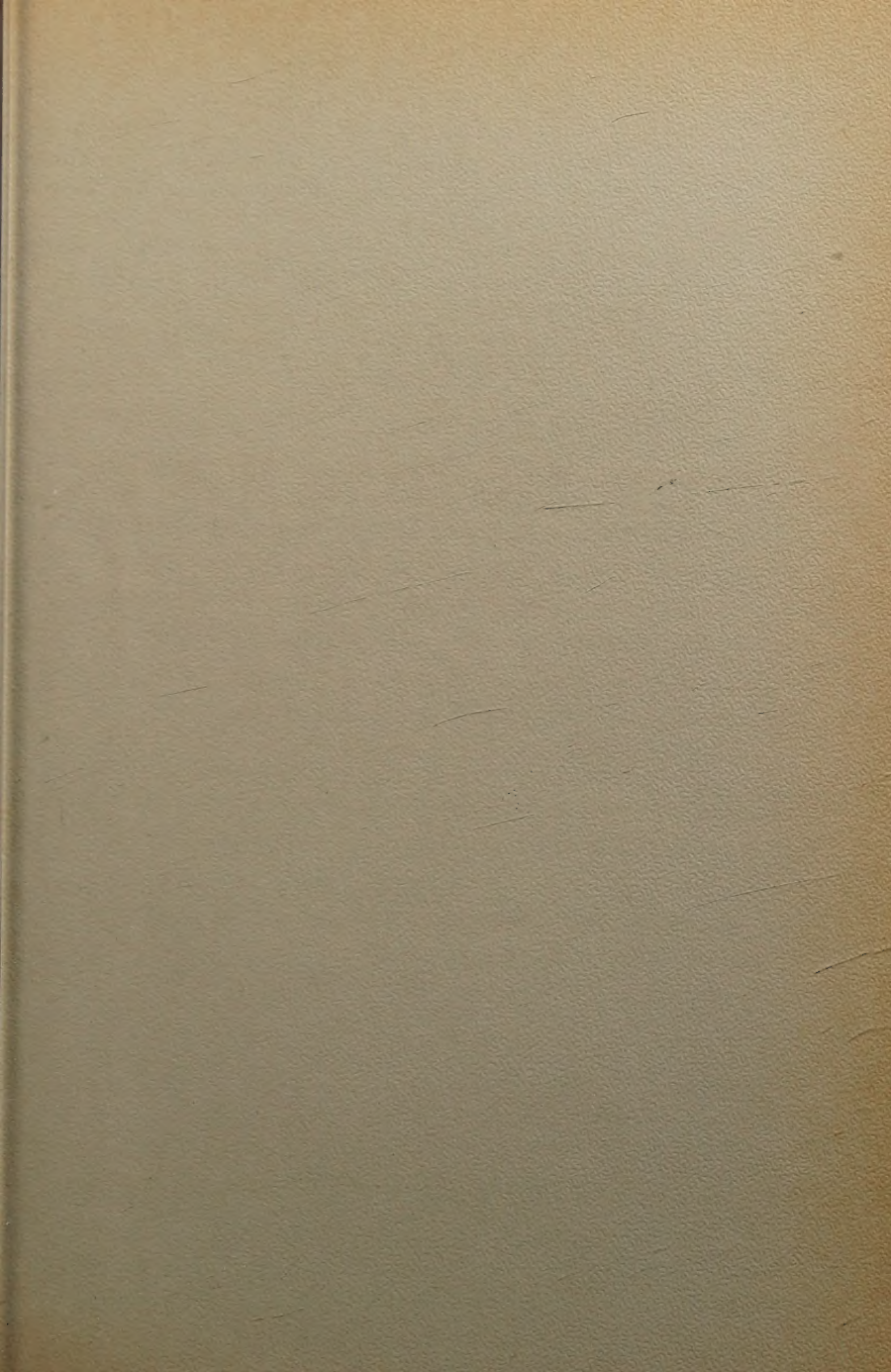
Christianity and Work, by James Myers and Benson Y. Landis. 25¢

A study course in the ethics of occupations.

FROM THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

156 Fifth Avenue, New York 10, N.Y.

The Meaning of Work. An Ecumenical Inquiry published by the Study Department of the World Council of Churches. 5¢



A new approach to "Christian vocation"

William May is the son of an executive in a large corporation, and has worked in various factory and construction jobs. He has studied literature and religion, and now teaches at Smith College. For the writing of this essay Mr. May read widely and systematically in the sociological and social psychological works on factory and bureaucracy; he talked to friends and relatives in the factory and corporation.

Here is an attempt by a talented and committed Christian writer to describe with sympathy the patterns of work in modern America. We think this is an especially interesting essay, full of insight, and an exciting contribution to a modern Christian understanding of man's work-life. We hope you find it to be so, too.